

***The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Sydney Division
Monaro Group***

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

John Richard Hunter (1921 -)

Civil Engineer

- Birth & Family:** John Richard Hunter was born on the 17th April 1921 in Inverell, NSW. His family moved to Sydney in 1923. John married his wife Pauline in his last year of University (1947); they had three daughters.
- Education:** North Strathfield Primary School.
Summer Hill Intermediate High School.
Fort Street Boys' High School.
- Qualifications:** BE (Civil) Sydney University 1948.
- Awards:** Imperial Services Order (1982).
- Memberships:** FIE (Aust)
L.M.ASCE
- Work History:** In 1938 Hunter began a Cadetship with the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission (WC&IC) where he was allocated to the Hydrographic Branch. As part of this Cadetship he was required to enrol in the five year Local Government Engineering Diploma Course at the Sydney Technical College. To gain an all-round knowledge of the Commission's work, cadets were transferred to other engineering related branches. In January 1941 Hunter was sent to the Snowy area to gain experience on survey work, which the Commission was doing as they explored the possibility of diverting the Snowy River from Jindabyne into the Murrumbidgee River via Bridle Creek just outside of Cooma.
- He enlisted in the AIF in December 1941 as a Sapper in the Engineers and was sent to Tamworth. He was made a Lieutenant Corporal(?) and after going to NCO School became a Lieutenant Sergeant(?) (*Both these ranks are unfamiliar to me. I know only of Lance Corporal, Corporal and Sergeant – the rank above Corporal. Could they be checked for accuracy please?*). Hunter was drafted to Singapore but because of the rapidly advancing Japanese forces this move did not take place, so he was sent to the School of Military Engineering to complete an officer-training course. He graduated as a Lieutenant and in May 1942 was posted to the 2/5 Aust Field Company of the 7th Division AIF, which was being posted to Papua New Guinea for the Owen Stanley Campaign.
- In 1946 Hunter began in the second year of the Faculty of Engineering at Sydney University, and graduated in 1949 with a BE in Civil Engineering. During holidays he continued to work for the WC&IC on Hydrographic work and after graduation he was transferred to the Design Branch. In December 1949 Hunter successfully applied for a position with the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority, and was appointed as a Grade 2 Engineer in the Investigation and Design Division. For the first two years he worked as a junior engineer on the investigation of several projects in the Snowy's Sydney Office.

Hunter was sent to the United States as part of the Snowy Mountains Authority's training scheme with the United States Bureau of Reclamation. He was trained in the design of concrete dams and gained practical experience on a concrete gravity dam in Montana. He returned in September 1952 and shortly after was transferred to the recently completed Cooma Office.

In 1953 Hunter was made Engineer for Contract Documents for civil works under the Chief Civil Engineer Ira Hughes. His job required him to assemble the contract documents into a final document, which involved technical aspects, liaison with the legal officer, administration and construction personnel. He was also required to prepare reports for top management following the inspections of international contractors..

In 1958 he applied for a transfer to the Civil Design Division to increase his design experience. He was made a Deputy Engineer for the Dams and Tunnels Branch. The Branch had a very heavy work load at this time as they were completing the design work for the Tooma Dam, Tooma – Tumut Tunnel, Tantangara Dam, Murrumbidgee – Eucumbene Tunnel, Tumut 2 Dam and the Tumut 2 Pressure and Tailrace Tunnels. Hunter was mainly concerned with the tunnels.

Because of the heavy workload it was decided in 1962 to split the Dams and Tunnels Branch into two branches. Hunter was made Engineer for Tunnels, a position he held until 1964 when he was made Engineer for Dams and was engaged on the design of all dams for the Scheme that were designed after Geehi; these included Jindabyne, Murray 2 concrete arch Dam, Talbingo and Blowering.

In the late 1960s he was offered a senior engineering position in Sydney, but although he found the offer tempting, he declined because it was difficult to leave an organisation that had become such a major part of his life.

After the Tumut 3 project had been under construction for about two years, the design work for the Snowy was coming to an end. Legislation was passed to form the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (SMEC) so that the experienced team established by the Authority, could continue to be used effectively.

In December 1970 Hunter was invited to become the Project Manager for an irrigation and hydro-electric project in South Korea, so he transferred to SMEC.

In 1972 he was made Engineer for Projects and was responsible for the preparation of proposals for overseas projects. In 1976 he was made the Chief Engineer for Feasibility Studies and Civil Design. In this role he was responsible for not only feasibility studies and civil design, but for inspections during construction and review of the projects with a panel of outside experts.

Hunter retired from SMEC in 1981 and worked as a private consultant on various projects in Australia and overseas. After 1991 he restricted his consultancy to special projects. Hunter commented that the spirit and teamwork that he encountered in the AIF during WWII was the same sort of spirit that he encountered in the Snowy Scheme.

Prepared by Patricia Taaffe, July 2003, from an oral history interview with John Hunter conducted by Matthew Higgins on 02.03.99.